567 upbringing and sentiments rejected the idea of such slavery, and
177 without giving in gracefully, for some of them stood to lose large capital investments, they accepted without question the principle of emancipation of slaves by capture. A few attempted to use subterfuge and tried to pass off slaves who were really slaves by capture as slaves for debt. Fortunately every contract among the Laotian people, [675] whatever it be, is a written one, and examination of these contracts was sufficient to foil all their ruses.

At the present time it may be said that this question has been solved. There are no longer any but voluntary slaves who like their life under their masters and, although free, want to stay there. Nearly all of them, moreover, are provided with a certification of liberation which their masters have forced them to request so that they, the masters, will not be accused later of keeping slaves by force.

Full justice must be given to the Laotian authorities who, although the first to suffer from this measure, have freely aided us in our task.

The reports by the government commissioners have noted the [126] good consequences of the measure. One of its first results was to bring a stop to the inter-tribal warfare among the Khas, warfare whose origin, if not its sole purpose, almost always lay in the capture of human cattle demanded by recognized slave traders [158] who were established in the land--they were mainly Burmese--and who had deliveries to make.

567 As regards slaves for debt, the question is a much more delicate one, for here we are confronted by a voluntary and for the most part uninteresting form of slavery.

In Laos, all crimes and misdemeanors must be paid for. This is the origin of nearly all debts, among the well-to-do as well as among the poorer classes. Among the latter, sentences for stealing buffalo or rice are usually involved, and among the well-to-do sentences for adultery or judicial decisions resulting from unsuccessful speculations. When sentence has been pronounced, money must be found immediately in order to avoid prison. If the borrower can offer security for payment the necessary sum is lent to him at annual interest rates which vary, depending on the province, from ten to twenty percent.

If the borrower is a poor man, he offers his person in payment of the interest and then becomes not the slave, but the servant in a house.

His status is not comparable to that of a slave by capture. Whereas the latter is a veritable beast of burden, often badly mistreated, obliged to work only for his master and to provide himself for his food and clothing, the slave for debts, on the other hand, is fed and